

# Asthma

Asthma is a disease of the lung airways. The airways get swollen and inflamed. They react easily to certain things, like viruses, smoke, or pollen. When the inflamed airways react, they get narrow. This makes it hard to breathe.

About 20 million Americans have asthma. Nearly five million are children. Many children outgrow asthma in their teen years. Each year, 5,000 people die from asthma. Asthma tends to run in the family.

Asthma is a chronic disease that can usually be managed with proper care.

## What are the signs of asthma?

Signs of asthma may include:

- Coughing
- Wheezing
- Shortness of breath
- Chest tightness

## Many things may start or worsen an asthma attack including:

- Contact with allergy triggers (dust mites, cockroaches, animal dander)
- Colds and flu
- Cigarette or cigar smoke

- Outside pollution (chemicals or dirt in the air)
- Exercise
- Poor air quality
- Cold air

## At what age do people get asthma?

Some people get asthma as children. Asthma may or may not go away as children grow up. Other people get asthma later in life.

## I think I have asthma. What should I do?

See your doctor. Some tests your doctor may order include:

- Breathing tests
- Chest X-ray
- Tests to show whether breathing problems may be caused by allergies or heart disease

## How can asthma be treated?

There are many medicines used to treat asthma. The kind of drug used may depend on how bad your asthma is. There are prescription drugs and over-the-counter drugs to treat asthma. Talk to your doctor about the best choice for you.



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## How can I keep my asthma under control?

- See your doctor on a regular basis.
- Ask your doctor for a plan. Be sure to follow it.
- Watch for early signs and act fast.
- Stay away from things that make your asthma worse.

## How do I know the signs of trouble?

- Coughing, wheezing, or shortness of breath gets much worse. This is called an “asthma attack.”
- You have trouble saying more than a few words at a time.
- You are struggling to breathe.

## What should I do if I see someone having an asthma attack?

- Stay calm.
- Find the person’s inhaler.
- Take the person away from smoke, pollution, and cold air.
- Call 911 if the person is still having trouble breathing.

**FDA Office of Women’s Health** <http://www.fda.gov/womens>

## To Learn More:

### National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute Health Information Center

Phone: 301-592-8573  
<http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov>